

## A rapid COVID-19 vaccine rollout backfired in some U.S. states

By CARLA K. JOHNSON and NICKY FORSTER  
Associated Press

Despite the clamor to speed up the U.S. vaccination drive against COVID-19 and get the country back to normal, the first three months of the rollout suggest faster is not necessarily better.

A surprising new analysis found that states such as South Carolina, Florida and Missouri that raced ahead of others to offer the vaccine to ever-larger groups of people have vaccinated smaller shares of their population than those that moved more slowly and methodically, such as Hawaii and Connecticut.

The explanation, as experts see it, is that the rapid expansion of eligibility caused a surge in demand too big for some states to handle and led to serious disarray. Vaccine supplies proved insufficient or unpredictable, websites crashed and phone lines became jammed, spreading confusion, frustration and resignation among many people.

"The infrastructure just wasn't ready. It kind of backfired," said Dr. Rebecca Wurtz, an infectious disease physician and health data specialist at the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health. She added: "In the rush to satisfy everyone, governors satisfied few and frustrated many."



In this March 9, 2021, file photo, Army health specialists fill syringes with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in Miami.

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Associated Press



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## A rapid COVID-19 vaccine rollout backfired in some U.S. states



Dr. Elizabeth Bergamini, pediatrician in suburban St. Louis, searches online for open COVID-19 vaccine appointments while holding her 4-month-old son, Louis, and supervising her 2-year-old son, James Jerome, at her home in Wildwood, Mo., on March 11, 2021.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

The findings could contain an important go-slow lesson for the nation's gover-

nors, many of whom have announced dramatic expansions in their rollouts over the past few days after being challenged

by President Joe Biden to make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1.

"If you're more targeted and more focused, you can do a better job," said Sema Sgaier, executive director of Surgo Ventures, a nonprofit health-data organization that conducted the analysis in collaboration with The Associated Press. "You can open it up — if you have set up the infrastructure to vaccinate all those people fast."

Numerous factors stymied state vaccination performance. Conspiracy theories, poor communication and undependable shipments slowed efforts after the first vials of precious vaccine arrived Dec. 14.

But the size of the eligible population was always within the control of state

officials, who made widely varying decisions about how many people they invited to get in line when there wasn't enough vaccine to go around.

When the drive began, most states put health care workers and nursing home residents at the front of the line. In doing so, states were abiding by national recommendations from experts who also suggested doing everything possible to reach everyone in those two groups before moving on to the next categories. But faced with political pressure and a clamor from the public, governors rushed ahead. Both the outgoing Trump administration and the incoming Biden team urged opening vaccinations to older Americans.

By late January, more than half the states had opened up to older adults — some 75 and above, others 65 and up. That's when the real problems started.

South Carolina expanded eligibility to people in Steven Kite's age group Jan. 13. Kite, 71, immediately booked a vaccination at a hospital.

But the next day, his appointment was canceled along with thousands of others because of a shortage of vaccine.

"It was frustrating at first," Kite said. After a week of uncertainty, he rescheduled. He and his wife are now vaccinated. "It ended up working out fine. I know they've had other problems. The delivery of the doses has been very unreliable."

In Missouri, big-city shortages sent vaccine seekers driving hundreds of miles to rural towns. Dr. Elizabeth Bergamini, a pediatrician in suburban St. Louis, drove about 30 people to often

out-of-the way vaccination events after the state opened eligibility to those 65 and older Jan. 18 and then expanded further.

"We went from needing to vaccinate several hundred thousand people in the St. Louis area to an additional half-million people, but we still hadn't vaccinated that first group, so it has been this mad dash," Bergamini said. "It has just been a whole hot mess."

"It got a little chaotic," said Dr. Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials. "We created far more demand than there was supply. That stressed the system and that may have left the system less efficient."

Plescia said the analysis suggests that "a more methodical, measured, judicious, priority-based approach — despite people's perception — actually can be as efficient, or more efficient, than opening things up and making it available to more people."

In retrospect, health workers and nursing home residents were the easy groups to vaccinate. Doses could be delivered to them where they lived and worked.

West Virginia bucked the trend with both high numbers of eligible residents and high vaccination rates in early March, but the state started slow and built its capacity before expanding eligibility.

Similarly, Alaska maintained a high vaccination rate with a smaller eligible population, then threw shots open to everyone 16 and older March 9. This big increase in eligible adults near the end of the period studied led the AP and Surgo Ventures to omit Alaska from the analysis. □



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# Gun waiting periods rare in U.S. states but more may be coming

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST

Associated Press

Not long before the deadly Atlanta-area shootings spread fear and anger through Asian American communities nationwide, police say the attacker made a legal purchase: a 9 mm handgun.

Within hours, they say, he had killed eight people, seven of them women and six of Asian descent, in a rampage targeting massage businesses.

If Georgia had required him to wait before getting a gun, lawmakers and advocates say, he might not have acted on his impulse.

"It's really quick. You walk in, fill out the paperwork, get your background check and walk out with a gun," said Robyn Thomas, executive director of the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. "If you're in a state of crisis, personal crisis, you can do a lot of harm fairly quickly." The purchase was a normal transaction at Big Woods Goods, a shop north of Atlanta that complies with federal background check laws and is cooperating with police, said Matt Kilgo, a lawyer for the store.

"There's no indication there's anything improper," he said.

The vast majority of states are like Georgia, allowing buyers to walk out of a store with a firearm after



In this Feb. 6, 2019, file photo, Robyn Thomas, executive director of the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence testifies before the House Judiciary Committee hearing on gun violence, at Capitol Hill in Washington.

a background check that sometimes can take minutes. Waiting periods are required in just 10 states and the District of Columbia, although several states are considering legislation this year to impose them.

Gun control advocates say mandating a window of even a couple of days between the purchase of a gun and taking possession can give more time for background checks and create a "cooling off" period for people considering harming themselves or someone else. Studies suggest that waiting periods

may help bring down firearm suicide rates by up to 11% and gun homicides by about 17%, according to the Giffords Center.

Georgia Democrats plan to introduce legislation that would require people to wait five days between buying a gun and getting it, said Rep. David Wilkerson, who is minority whip in the state House.

"I think a waiting period just makes sense," he said.

A 2020 analysis by the Rand Corp., a nonprofit think tank, also found that research links waiting periods to decreased suicide

and homicide rates but determined that the effect on mass shootings was inconclusive because the sample size was too small.

California has one of the country's longest waiting periods — 10 days. That did not stop more than 1.1 million people from buying guns last year, which was just shy of the record number sold in 2016. Gun sales nationwide, meanwhile, surged to record levels last year amid pandemic-related uncertainty.

Against that backdrop, lawmakers in at least four states — Arizona, New York,

Pennsylvania and Vermont — have proposed creating or expanding waiting periods. New gun laws will not fix deep-seated problems such as racism, misogyny and violence, said Seo Yoon "Yoonie" Yang, a leader with Students Demand Action, a gun violence prevention group. But they can help keep guns out of the hands of people who would do harm in the meantime, she said.

"Legislation is practical. Research shows that it works," she said. "It is change that can happen efficiently and quickly."

"In Atlanta, imagine if this guy's parents or somebody else were notified that he was trying to get a firearm. Maybe they could have helped," he said. "It wouldn't have hurt anybody to wait ... let it breathe a while. If there's a problem, let it surface, we'll sort it out."

Gun rights groups, including the National Rifle Association, oppose waiting periods. The group points to 2018 federal firearm-tracing data that shows the average time between first retail sale of a gun and involvement in a crime was nearly nine years. They also argue that waiting periods create a delay for people buying legally, while leaving illegal weapons transfers unaffected. □

Associated Press

## North Korean man extradited to U.S. in sanctions case

By MICHAEL BALSAMO

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A North Korean citizen was taken into U.S. custody on Saturday after being extradited from Malaysia to face money laundering charges, making him the first North Korean extradited to the U.S. to face trial. Mun Chol Myong was in the custody of the FBI in Washington, D.C. on Saturday, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press. His extradition came after a Malaysian court rejected his assertion that the charges were politically motivated.

The Justice Department declined comment on Sunday.

A federal judge in Washington had issued a warrant for Mun's arrest on May 2, 2019 on money laundering and conspiracy charges. Mun, who is in his 50s, has lived in Malaysia for a decade and was arrested in May 2019 after the U.S. requested his extradition. Malaysia's government approved the extradition, but Mun challenged the bid.

His lawyer has said Mun worries he won't get a fair trial in the U.S. They have argued that the extradition is "politically motivated" and

aimed to increase pressure on North Korea over the nation's missile program.

Mun has denied allegations that he was involved in supplying prohibited luxury goods from Singapore to North Korea in violation of U.N. sanctions before moving to Malaysia in 2008. He has also denied allegations he laundered funds through front companies and produced fraudulent documents to support illicit shipments.

North Korea said it had also terminated diplomatic ties with Malaysia over the decision to extradite Mun to the U.S. in the latest de-



A staff locks the front gate of North Korean embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Sunday, March 21, 2021.

Associated Press

velopment in growing animosity between Washington and Pyongyang as the

North ramps up pressure on the Biden administration over a nuclear standoff. □



# Police chief says Miami partying “couldn’t go on any longer”

By KELLI KENNEDY

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP)

— Pointing to over 1,000 arrests in one of the nation’s top party spots, Miami Beach officials warned Sunday that the unruly spring break crowd gathering by the thousands, fighting in the streets, destroying restaurant property and refusing to wear masks has become a serious threat to public safety.

During a last-minute meeting Sunday, city officials voted to extend a highly unusual 8 p.m. curfew for another week along famed South Beach, with the possibility of extending it well into April if needed, and stressed this isn’t the typical spring break crowd. They said it’s not college students, but adults looking to let loose in one of the few states fully open during the pandemic.

Law enforcement officers from at least four other agencies, along with SWAT teams, were added to help contain the raucous crowds, but it wasn’t enough. After days of partying, including several confrontations with police, Miami Beach officials enacted a highly unorthodox curfew Saturday from 8 p.m. until 6 a.m., forcing restaurants to stop outdoor seating entirely during the three-day emergency period, and encouraging local businesses to voluntarily shut down.

More than half of the more than 1,000 arrests were from out of state, said City Manager Raul Aguila, adding many are coming “to



In this image taken from video, police officers stand guard Saturday evening, March 20, 2021, as crowds descend on South Beach in Miami. After days of partying and confrontations between police and large crowds, Miami Beach officials have ordered an emergency curfew.

Associated Press

engage in lawlessness and anything goes party attitude.” He also noted that the crowds weren’t eating at restaurants or patronizing businesses generating badly needed tourism dollars, but merely congregating by the thousands in the street.

Officers in bullet proof vests dispersed pepper spray balls Saturday night into a defiant, but mostly non-violent crowd, refusing to submit to the curfew that had only been enacted four hours earlier. Some people responded by jumping on top of cars, twerking and throwing money into the air.

A military style vehicle was seen rolling down the palm-tree lined Ocean Drive as outnumbered Miami Beach police officers struggled to disperse the raucous crowds Saturday. Tourists were urged to stay inside their hotels and pedestrians or vehicles were

not allowed to enter the restricted area after 8 p.m. Miami Beach Police Chief Richard Clements initially became concerned Monday when the crowds seemed larger than normal on what is typically a quieter day. A group of vehicles blocked the street “and basically had an impromptu street party,” he said. By Thursday, the crowds were growing, fights were breaking out, setting off dangerous stampedes of people fleeing for safety.

“We couldn’t go on any longer,” Chief Clements said during Sunday’s meeting, defending the city’s curfew. “I think this was the right decision.”

By Friday night, police said the partying was out of control. One restaurant was “turned upside down” in the melee, “chairs were used as weapons,” and broken glass covered the floor.

Next door, the iconic bar,

the Cleveland South Beach, announced it was temporarily suspending all food and beverage operations until at least March 24 after crowds crammed Ocean Drive, breaking out into street fights.

After gunshots were fired, a young woman cut her leg so badly in a stampede that she was transported to the hospital where they initially thought she had been shot, police said.

“How many more things are we going to allow to occur before we step in,” said Chief Clements.

Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber said he has trouble sleeping at night, worried about the out-of-control parties.

“When hundreds of people are running through the streets panicked, you realize that’s not something that a police force can control,” he said during a commission meeting Sunday.

Local officials have struggled to enforce COVID ordinances. Florida has no statewide mask rules, limits on capacity or other such restrictions, courtesy of Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis’ pro-business stance.

“I think there are very few places that have been open as our state have been open,” said Gelber. “We’re in the middle of a pandemic. The virus is still very present in our community. We have 1,000 infections a day on most days.” One commissioner asked whether a toll could be levied on non-residents to discourage visitors. Several said it was time for a new marketing campaign to help rebrand South Beach’s as a party city, pointing to the small handful of arrests in nearby Fort Lauderdale over spring break.

Local officials and businesses have struggled to balance courting tourists to boost the economy while doing so safely amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Local residents complained they spent three to four hours in traffic after bridges were closed during the curfew and some restaurants asked for permission to continue food delivery after the curfew.

Miami tourism officials say billions of dollars were lost when the pandemic first erupted last year, canceling spring break and forcing beach closures across the Sunshine State. The city’s tourism arm just spent \$5 million on its biggest national advertising campaign in 20 years. □

## Lawsuit filed over hit-and-run death of Nicki Minaj’s father

**MINEOLA, N.Y. (AP)** — Rapper Nicki Minaj’s mother, Carol Maraj, has filed a \$150 million lawsuit against the man who is accused of killing Minaj’s father in a hit-and-run crash last month, an attorney for Maraj said.

Charles Plevich, 70, is accused of striking Robert Maraj, 64, on Long Island on Feb. 12 and then driving off without calling 911. Maraj died at a hospital the next day.

Plevich was arrested on Feb. 17 on charges of leaving the scene of an incident and tampering with physical evidence. He pleaded

not guilty and was freed on bail and ordered not to leave New York state.

Newsday reports that Carol Maraj’s lawsuit, filed in Nassau County state Supreme Court earlier this month, claims that Plevich was negligent, reckless and careless when he hit Maraj with his car and allegedly left him at the scene.

“He was not only irresponsible and negligent, but more concerned about running away and hiding than seeking help,” Benjamin Crump, one of the attorneys representing Carol Maraj,

said in an Instagram post Friday.

A telephone message was left Sunday with Plevich’s attorney, listed in online court records as Marc Gann of Mineola.

Nicki Minaj, who was born Onika Tanya Maraj, has not made any public statement on her father’s death.

Carol Maraj, the victim’s estranged wife, told Newsday last month that she was “very, very, very happy” about Plevich’s arrest and said all of Maraj’s children “are pleased” that the alleged culprit was caught. □



# In Kabul, Pentagon chief speaks of 'responsible end' to war

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and  
RAHIM FAIEZ

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)

— U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, on his first visit to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief, said Sunday that the Biden administration wants to see “a responsible end” to America’s longest war, but the level of violence must decrease for “fruitful” diplomacy to have a chance. With questions swirling about how long U.S. troops will remain in the country, Austin said that “in terms of an end date or setting a specific date for withdrawal, that’s the domain of my boss.” He said his stop in Kabul, the capital, where he met with military commanders and senior Afghan government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani, was intended to let him “listen and learn” and “inform my participation” in reviewing the future of the American force.

President Joe Biden said last week in an ABC News interview that it will be “tough” for the U.S. to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But Biden said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between the Trump administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn’t be by a “lot longer.”

Austin, who arrived after a visit to India, said: “There’s



U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, left, meets Afghan President Ashraf Ghani at the presidential palace in Kabul, Afghanistan, Sunday, March 21, 2021.

Associated Press

always going to be concerns about things one way or the other, but I think there’s a lot of energy focused on, you know, doing what’s necessary to bring about a responsible end, a negotiated settlement to the war.”

The Taliban on Friday warned of consequences if the United States doesn’t meet the deadline. Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiation team, told reporters that if American troops were to stay beyond May 1, “it will be a kind of violation of the agreement. That violation would not be from

our side. ... Their violation will have a reaction.” A statement released by the presidential palace on the Ghani-Austin meeting said both sides condemned the increase in violence in Afghanistan. There was no mention of the May 1 deadline. Washington is reviewing the agreement the Trump administration signed with the Taliban last year and has been stepping up pressure on both sides in the protracted conflict to find a swift route to a peace agreement. “It’s obvious that the level of violence remains pretty high in the country,” Austin said.

“We’d really like to see that violence come down and I think if it does come down, it can begin to set the conditions for, you know, some really fruitful diplomatic work.” In a sharply worded letter to Ghani earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it was urgent to make peace in Afghanistan and that all options remained on the table. He also warned that it was likely the Taliban would make swift territorial gains if U.S. and NATO troops withdrew. The United States spends \$4 billion a year to sustain Afghanistan’s National Security

Forces. The Taliban warned America against defying the May 1 deadline, at a news conference in Moscow, the day after meeting with senior Afghan government negotiators and international observers to try to jumpstart a stalled peace process to end Afghanistan’s decades of war. Washington has given both the Taliban and the Afghan government an eight-page peace proposal, which both sides are reviewing. It calls for an interim “peace government” that would shepherd Afghanistan toward constitutional reform and elections.

Ghani has resisted an interim administration causing his critics to accuse him of clinging to power. He says elections alone would be acceptable to bring a change of government.

Both the U.S. and Kabul have called for a reduction in violence leading to a cease-fire. The Taliban say a cease-fire would be part of the peace negotiations. The insurgent movement has not attacked U.S. or NATO troops since signing the agreement.

But U.S. military commanders and NATO leaders have argued that the Taliban have not lived up to their part of the peace agreement, which includes a reduction in violence and a separation from al-Qaida and other terrorist groups. □

## 5 nations demand better EU sharing of migration load

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — The interior ministers of the five Mediterranean countries on the front line of mass migration to Europe want their EU partners to share the burden more equitably. “We can no longer be punished for our geographical position,” Malta’s Byron Camilleri said Saturday, summing up his position and that of his colleagues from Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain after they met in Athens.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and European Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas joined part of the meeting,

Schinas is coordinating the commission’s work to revise the European Union’s pact on migration and asylum.

Ministers from Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain created a “MED 5” group last year in an effort to present united front and influence the new EU pact. Their demands are threefold: better cooperation with the countries in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia where most Europe-bound migrants and asylum-seekers come from; greater willingness by other EU member nations to accept newly arrived migrants; and a central-

ized European repatriation mechanism overseen by the EU’s executive commission.

More than a thousand people protested in solidarity with migrants and refugees in the center of Athens on Saturday. The timing was intended to coincide with the officials’ meeting. Southern European countries with extensive coastlines have borne the brunt of arriving asylum-seekers hoping to enter the EU. Most Europe-bound migrants travel by boat on dangerous maritime smuggling routes, either from the Turkish coast to nearby



From left, Greece’s Minister of Migration and Asylum Notis Mitarachi, Interior Minister of Spain Fernando Grande-Marlaska, Italy’s Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese, Cyprus’ Interior Minister Nicos Nouris and Byron Camilleri, Malta’s Interior Minister make statements following their meeting in Athens, Saturday, March 20, 2021.

Associated Press

Greek islands or across the Mediterranean from north Africa.

The ministers discussed whether Turkey played an

active role in pushing migrants toward Europe in contravention of a 2016 migration-control between the EU and Turkey. □



## Ex-top aide to former Maltese PM charged with corruption

By **FRANCES D'EMILIO**

**Associated Press**

**ROME (AP)** — A former top government aide in Malta who was investigated by a journalist later killed by a car bomb has been arraigned in a Maltese court on charges of money-laundering, fraud and corruption.

Keith Schembri, who was chief of staff to Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, entered a not-guilty plea to the charges, which stem from an investigation of alleged financial crimes going back years.

Schembri, for years one of Malta's more politically influential figures, was denied bail and jailed after Saturday's arraignment. Also arraigned were 10 other defendants.

Maltese government officials on Sunday confirmed the development in the case, widely reported by Maltese media. Schembri resigned from his job in 2019. Muscat himself resigned shortly after.

Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia implicated Schembri in cases of alleged corruption before she was killed in Malta in 2017.

Schembri stepped down from his government post after media reports linked him and two then-ministers to the probe of the bombing. Schembri and the former ministers have denied



*This undated file photo shows Malta Prime Minister Joseph Muscat's former chief of staff Keith Schembri.*

any wrongdoing.

One of the late journalist's sons, Paul Caruana Galizia, in a tweet called Schembri's arraignment "just extraordinary." He added that the defendant for years had "accused my mother of using forged documents to implicate him in corruption cases."

In her blog, the journalist wrote boldly about corruption and investigated the financial affairs of Maltese politicians and business figures. Caruana Galizia had written that corruption was

rife in Malta's business and political circles. She had reported receiving threats shortly before she was slain. The Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation, a non-profit organization which, in its words, fights "for justice and truth," said: "Prosecuting Schembri today brings us a step closer to a Malta where no one is above the law," — adding that "is the country Daphne fought for."

Investigation of Schembri grew in part out of a request for inquiry by a po-

litical opposition leader, Simon Busuttil, in 2017.

Busuttil had alleged deliberate inaction by Maltese police.

But the arraignment also stemmed from a separate inquiry by magistrates into claims of alleged kickbacks from the sale of passports involving Schembri and his financial advisors, Maltese media said.

Malta's loose financial and banking rules combined to make the Mediterranean island nation an attractive place for money launder-

ers. Part of the 2016 leaks of the so-called Panama Papers alleged that offshore financial structures had been set up for Schembri and others.

Muscat's successor, Prime Minister Robert Abela, was asked on a TV program in Malta on Sunday about whether the Muscat government's defense of Schembri at the time reflected the national interest.

Abela sidestepped the question, replying "I can only answer for what I did," the Malta Independent quoted the current leader as saying.

Last month, one of three men accused in the bombing that killed Caruana Galizia as she drove near her home on the island nation changed his plea to guilty and was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He had been accused of detonating the bomb.

Two co-defendants accused of detonating the bomb have kept their not-guilty pleas, and separate court proceedings against them are continuing.

In 2019, 10 days after he was arrested while sailing from Malta on his yacht, a Maltese hotelier was charged with being an accomplice to causing the blast.

The killing triggered international calls, including from within the European Union, for accountability. □

## Fleeing coup, Myanmar police refugees in India seek asylum



*A police officer and his wife who fled Myanmar following a military coup attend to their infant at an undisclosed place in Mizoram, a state bordering Myanmar, India, Friday, March 19, 2021.*

**Associated Press**

By **ANUPAM NATH**

**Associated Press**

**MIZORAM, India (AP)** — Myanmar police officers

who fled to India after they said they defied orders to shoot people protesting their country's military coup

are urging India's government not to send them back and to grant them asylum on humanitarian grounds. One of the officers who has sought refuge in a village in the northeastern Indian state of Mizoram along the border with Myanmar said they didn't want to return to their country until the problems there are solved. That officer and others who spoke to The Associated Press did so on condition of anonymity out of concern for the safety of family members still in Myanmar.

Another officer who fled told AP that soldiers ordered them to "arrest,

beat, torture the protesters" and said police were always sent to the front whenever there was protest. She said the officers had "no choice" but to leave Myanmar.

The security crackdown following Myanmar's Feb. 1 coup has forced scores of refugees over the border into India. India's state and federal authorities haven't given any figures, but some state ministers have said the number could be in the hundreds. One Indian village has given shelter to 34 police personnel and one firefighter who crossed into India over the last two

weeks. The AP has not been able to independently verify their claims that they were ordered to shoot protesters, though images and accounts of the security forces' crackdown inside Myanmar have shown intensifying violence against civilians. More than 200 people have been killed by security forces since the coup. India's federal government and the state of Mizoram are at odds over the influx of refugees. Earlier, the Mizoram government had allowed refugees to enter and provided them with food and shelter. □



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## Mexico limits non-essential travel on southern border

By **MARÍA VERZA**  
**Associated Press**

**CIUDAD HIDALGO, Mexico (AP)** —

The Mexican banks of the Suchiate river dawned Sunday with a heavy presence of immigration agents in place to enforce Mexico's new limits on all but essential travel at its shared border with Guatemala.

Dozens of immigration agents lined the riverside asking those who landed on the giant innertube rafts that carry most of the cross-border traffic for documentation and turning many back.

But those turned away weren't migrants, they were the small-time Guatemalan merchants and residents from Tecun Uman, across the river, who buy in bulk in Mexico to re-sell in Guatemala or purchase household items when the exchange rate favors it.

"They haven't let us enter because they think we're migrants when really we're only coming to shop," said Amalia Vázquez, a Guatemalan citizen with her baby tied to her back and seven other relatives accompanying her. Vázquez said her family travels the 100 kilometers monthly from Quetzaltenango to buy plastic items and sweets they re-sell at home.

After a negotiation, immigration agents allowed her sister and another relative to pass, but they had to leave their IDs with agents while they shopped. Nearby, other agents turned away a man who said he was just coming to buy his medicine.

The Mexican government has interrupted the usually free-flowing cross-river traffic here before, infuriating merchants on both sides. In recent years, as migrant caravans arrived in Tecun

Uman, Mexican troops lined the Mexican side of the Suchiate and largely stopped the raft traffic.

The last time was in January 2020 when hundreds of soldiers blocked large groups of migrants trying to cross.

This time there is no large migrant presence across the river, but Mexico is again under pressure to slow the flow of migrants north as the U.S. government wrestles with growing numbers, especially of families and unaccompanied minors.

Many of those, however, are believed to be traveling with smugglers who can simply choose among the hundreds of unmonitored crossing points on Mexico's long jungle borders with Guatemala and Belize.

The government said the measures that went into effect Sunday — one year into the pandemic — were aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19. But most saw it as a cover to again try to control illegal migration and no one was talking about health concerns. The U.S. and Mexico have had a similar limit on non-essential travel on their shared border for a year, but Mexico is one of the few countries to otherwise not impose health restrictions on people entering the country by land or air.

The Mexican government last week also announced a new effort against the smuggling of families with minors. They said they would increase patrols in areas and checkpoints and use drones and night vision to watch crossing points.

On Saturday, Mexico's immigration agency announced that authorities had detained 95 Central American and Cuban migrants who arrived by plane

to the northern city of Monterrey. Among them were eight unaccompanied minors. The flights originated in southeast Mexican cities, Villahermosa and Cancun. Smugglers sometimes put migrants who can pay on such flights to avoid highway checkpoints in Mexico. On Friday, hundreds of National Guard troops and immigration agents paraded through the capital of the southern state of Chiapas. On Sunday, few soldiers were visible along the river. "It's all a show," said a woman with a sweets stand in the market, who asked to remain anonymous to avoid retaliation. "They don't let the ones coming to buy pass, but the smugglers are very active."

Mexico's National Immi-



Guatemalan travelers cross the Suchiate River, border between Guatemala and Mexico, into Mexico aboard a raft near Ciudad Hidalgo, Sunday, March 21, 2021.

Associated Press

gration Institute says smugglers are telling Central American migrants to bring children to improve their chances of entering Mexico and the United States.

The flow hasn't reached early 2019 levels yet, but the U.S. government is worried by the rapid increase in illegal entries since last fall. □

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MedCare Clinic, a high-quality medical clinic that is specialized in care for tourists and that has been appointed as the national COVID-19 clinic for tourists, and Laboratorio di Servizio, a full-service modern medical laboratory with state-of-the-art equipment, have partnered up to provide fast and reliable COVID-19 testing to all. Laboratorio di Servizio is ISO-15189:2012 accredited by the Dutch Council for Accreditation (M317). Just steps away from you

The general Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Centers are located at the Cove Mall and at the Mill Resort, two locations at a stone's throw from your resort, condominium, or other vacation accommodation. Contact them to make an appointment, or just walk-in when it is convenient to you. It is recommended that the tests are done timely, as the negative test is only accepted if taken up to three days before boarding your flight. MedCare Fit2Fly Testing Center at the Cove Mall is opposite the Holiday Inn and is open every day for walk-ins from 8am through 10pm. MedCare's other location is situated at The Mill Resort, across the street from the RIU Hotel and is open every day from 8:30am until 12:30pm. Naturally, if you wish to arrange an appointment for your tests before coming to Aruba this is also possible by contacting us.



### At your hotel

For a selection of hotels/resorts in Aruba, MedCare has setup Testing Centers on site. The hotels/resorts at which we have a testing site are: Divi All Inclusive, Divi Dutch Village, Divi Golf, Divi Phoenix, Divi Tamarijn, Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort, Hyatt Regency, Renaissance, and the Ritz-Carlton Resort. Please contact your front desk for more information on our Testing Centers at these properties.



### Costs and timing

Passengers must be tested with a viral test that could be either an Antigen Test or a nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT), such as the reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (PCR). The costs for the Antigen Test are only \$50, and the PCR Test is available as well, for a higher charge of \$125. At this moment, only MedCare offers the easier and substantially cheaper Antigen Test that is acceptable for travel to the U.S. as per the CDC guidelines. Pre-travel testing is not covered by the Aruban visitor insurance. Please contact your insurance company to verify if testing costs are insured. Results are e-mailed to you within 24 hours of testing.

### Testing at home

We also offer testing at your house/hotel room for a one-time extra fee of \$120. This fee covers testing up to 10 people (one appointment, at one location and a specific time). Additional persons will be charged \$10 per person. ☐

### To book your test in advance, please contact:

Phone: +297 280 0630

Email: [info@medcare.aw](mailto:info@medcare.aw)

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## Honoring loyal guests at Divi Aruba

**EAGLE BEACH** —Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as Distinguished Visitors and Emerald Ambassadors of Aruba. The Distinguished Visitor certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba 10 years and more consecutively. The Emerald Ambassador certificate is presented to guests who visit Aruba 35 years and more consecutively.

The honorees were the lovely couple **Mr. Stephen L. D'Andrilli & Mrs. Lucy Eng-D'Andrilli**, who were honored as distinguished visitors of Aruba. Also honored was Mr. Herbert Wydom who received the highest



honorary title of Emerald Ambassador.

The Emerald Ambassador certificate is the highest certificate that we present,

and is given to visitors who have been visiting Aruba 35 years or more consecu-

tively. It is incredibly beautiful to see that Aruba has so many loyal visitors, and we hope to see them for many more years to come.

All these lovely visitors are from USA. They stated that they love the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches, beautiful sunsets, delicious variety of foods, its safety, and Aruba's warm and friendly people whom became like family to us.

Richardson together with the representatives of the Divi Aruba all-Inclusive Resort presented the certificates to the honorees and also handed over some presents and thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination and as their home away from home. □

## Aruba to me

**ORANJESTAD** — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

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Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received an amazing picture from **Pete and Erica**. They wrote:

"Aruba to us is relaxing on the beautiful beach early in the morning with coffee and a paper. This is our second trip to Aruba in the last year and brought our parents along this time. Such an awesome country. Woohoo! Cheers!"

"Love you Aruba!"





## JetBlue and CommonPass: Launch of Digital Health Pass with Boston Customers Bound For Aruba

**NEW YORK – JetBlue (NASDAQ: JBLU) and The Commons Project Foundation, in partnership with the government of Aruba and COVID testing companies Vault and XpresCheck, today announced they have launched the use of the CommonPass platform, allowing JetBlue customers traveling from Boston's Logan International Airport to Aruba's Queen Beatrix International Airport to enter the nation using the CommonPass digital health pass. The CommonPass platform enables safer travel and easy entry as travelers can simply scan their passports to verify that they meet entry requirements into Aruba.**

The first flight for eligible customers landed Tuesday in Aruba and will continue for all JetBlue flights from Boston to the island destination. The airline and its partners plan in the coming weeks to expand the use of CommonPass for customers traveling to Aruba from cities throughout JetBlue's network.

Aruba requires that arriving passengers test negative for COVID-19 either within 72 hours of or upon arrival. Boston customers who utilize JetBlue's testing partners, Vault for supervised at-home PCR tests or XpresCheck for in-person testing, are now able to streamline the arrival process in Aruba by downloading the CommonPass app in advance of their flight. Upon arrival, CommonPass users will have access to dedicated CommonPass immigration lanes to start their vacation sooner. More testing

facilities are expected to be added to the CommonPass platform in the coming weeks and months.

"CommonPass and the CommonTrust Network provide passengers, airlines and governments with a trusted system to digitally verify that an international traveler meets entry requirements upon arrival," said Paul Meyer, CEO, The Commons Project Foundation. "Our registry of health data sources — information from labs, pharmacies, hospitals and health departments — is essential to giving the public the confidence to once again travel, attend events and enjoy activities they did prior to COVID-19." The companies announced the partnership late last year. With CommonPass, JetBlue customers can more easily comply with Aruba's enhanced entry protocols, enabling arriving residents and visitors who have tested negative for COVID-19 to digitally verify their health status, and for visitors to begin their vacation worry-free.

The CommonPass platform lets individuals collect their lab results and vaccination records from health data sources in the CommonTrust Network and demonstrate in a privacy-preserving manner that those records satisfy the health screening requirements of their destinations. CommonPass is being deployed with leading global airlines, while Aruba becomes the first government to adopt the platform to streamline entry into the nation. CommonPass leverages the open, interoperable SMART Health Cards standard being de-

veloped under the Vaccination Credential Initiative and is being adopted across the US healthcare ecosystem.

"As one of the first airlines in the world to partner with CommonPass and the CommonTrust Network, we are excited to again lead the way in providing another layer of safety to air travel in the United States and around the world," said Joanna Geraghty, president and chief operating officer, JetBlue. "Our partners in the Aruban government and the Aruba Tourism Authority have a long history of promoting seamless travel to Aruba, and by using digital health passes to verify that a customer meets entry requirements upon arrival, JetBlue, CommonPass, and Aruba are leveraging leading edge technology to restore both customer confidence and air travel. JetBlue customers traveling to Aruba will enjoy an expedited way to enter the country on arrival, while also having peace of mind that they safely meet Aruba's entry criteria."

"Aruba is thrilled to offer Boston, one of our premier markets, the first CommonPass flights to our One happy island," said Dangui Oduber, Aruba's Minister of Health, Tourism and Sport. "CommonPass travelers departing from Boston's Logan International Airport will now arrive in Aruba via the most seamless entry way possible, ensuring their vacation starts the moment they land."

"Vault's saliva test has helped thousands of travelers safely get to their destinations during the pandemic through our partnerships with airlines, countries, and states," said Vault Health Founder & CEO Jason Feldman. "Careful testing is a key to helping people move forward with the vacations and adventures they've missed over the past year. We are pleased to continue our partnership with CommonPass, JetBlue, and Aruba to streamline testing for travel, especially internationally. Vault's test is convenient, quick, and provides accurate results to help keep travelers and residents safe."

"XpresCheck is uniquely positioned to help open up travel from Boston to Aruba in partnership with CommonPass and JetBlue with on-site airport COVID testing at Boston Logan International Airport," said Doug Satzman, CEO of XpresSpa Group. "This innovative technology enables a traveler to get tested at the airport before departure with a seamless integration into the CommonPass app, which can reduce time and stress for travelers while increasing safety for the entire flight."



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### Easy Steps to Enter Aruba

CommonPass is a digital health app that enables travelers to present standardized, verifiable proof that they have tested negative for COVID-19.

### The process works like this:

- 1) Prior to their flight, travelers download the CommonPass app.
- 2) As part of the partnership with Vault and XpresCheck, travelers can be tested for COVID-19 from home or at the airport.
- 3) Once tested for COVID-19 and prior to their flight, travelers enter an invitation code into the CommonPass app and upload their COVID-19 test results into CommonPass.
- 4) All visitors to Aruba must fill out an online ED Card, which includes results of their negative PCR-based molecular COVID-19 test. CommonPass users are able to add their pass ID to pre-verify with Aruba that they are cleared to travel.
- 5) Upon arrival in Aruba, CommonPass users will have access to dedicated CommonPass immigration lanes to start their vacation sooner.



# Supply bottlenecks leave ships stranded, businesses stymied

By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG

AP Business Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — A trade bottleneck born of the COVID-19 outbreak has U.S. businesses anxiously awaiting goods from Asia — while off the coast of California, dozens of container ships sit anchored, unable to unload their cargo.

The pandemic has wreaked havoc with the supply chain since early 2020, when it forced the closure of factories throughout China. The seeds of the current problems were sown last March, when Americans stayed home and dramatically changed their buying habits — instead of clothes, they bought electronics, fitness equipment and home improvement products. U.S. companies responded by flooding reopened Asian factories with orders, leading to a chain reaction of congestion and snags at ports and freight hubs across the country as the goods began arriving.

Main Street businesses are now forced to wait months instead of the usual weeks for a delivery from China, and no one knows when the situation will be resolved. Owners do a lot of explaining to customers, order more inventory than usual and lower their expectations for when their shipments will arrive.

Alejandro Bras used to be able to place an order to factories in China and expect to receive his products in 30 days. Now, with problems throughout the supply chain, “we’re adding an additional two months,” he says. And that two months is “iffy” — it can take even longer.

Bras’ company, Womple Studios, sells monthly subscription boxes with educational crafts and activities for children; many of the products are custom-made, so he can’t easily find substitutes.

Bras has found himself spending more time on logistics rather than product development, and more time apologizing to the Oakland, California, company’s customers who expect a shipment each



In this Wednesday, March 3, 2021 photo, container cargo ships are seen docked in the Port of Los Angeles.

Associated Press

month. Customers have been understanding — they realize the pandemic has upset shipping and trade worldwide.

The cluster of ships offshore are perhaps the most dramatic symptom of an overwhelmed supply chain. As production surged in Asia, more ships began arriving in the fall at ports in Los Angeles, Long Beach and other West Coast cities than the gateways could handle. Ships holding as many as 14,000 containers have sat offshore, some of them for over a week. At times there have been as many as 40 ships waiting; normally, there’s no more than a handful, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California, a service that monitors port traffic and operations.

“With this type of backlog, it will take several weeks to work through that. It doesn’t go away. And new ships are sailing to the U.S. even as we speak,” says Shanton Wilcox, a manufacturing adviser with PA Consulting.

But there are choke points on land as well. It can take 8,000 trucks to haul the cargo away from a ship, says Kip Louttit, executive director of the Marine Exchange

of Southern California. But when all those trucks hit the road, there aren’t enough available when dockworkers are trying to unload the next ships in port. Freight rail traffic has also been affected.

“When you have more cargo, you have a less efficient cargo moving system,” Louttit says. The pandemic itself is also slowing down the flow of goods, sidelining workers in warehouses at the ports, he says.

Put all the problems together, and when a ship gets into port, it takes five to seven days to unload instead of two to three, says Shruti Gupta, an industrial analyst with the consulting firm RSM. “That again has consequences on truckers and rail service, because they have to wait until the port clears,” she says.

“Normally a shipment can be booked with a couple days’ notice and currently you have to book containers 30 days in advance,” says Peter Mann, CEO of Oransi, a maker of air purifiers and filters based in Raleigh, North Carolina. He has to account for shipment times twice as long as normal in his operating plans.

When Mann began having

trouble getting shipments in the fall, he decided to place larger orders — getting the goods manufactured wasn’t a problem and fewer deliveries meant less waiting time. It has meant investing more money in inventory.

Supply disruptions can be a more serious problem for smaller companies because, unlike larger players, they may not be able to shift production to other countries — for example, Western Hemisphere nations whose products can be shipped to East Coast ports. And big companies can better afford to use air freight, which is more expensive than shipping.

“The price can be as much as five times as usual,” says Craig Wolfe, whose company, CelebriDucks, has had problems getting rubber ducks from China since the start of the pandemic. One of Wolfe’s shipments sat on the dock for three weeks because there were no railcars available. Another that he expected to be shipped by mid-February still hasn’t left China.

“It would have arrived by now,” says Wolfe, whose company is based in Kelseyville, California. He’s anxious because most of

his products aren’t typical rubber ducks — they’re based on presidents and other celebrities and pop culture trends like the Harry Potter books and movies. Like Mann, he’s placed some larger-than-usual orders to be sure he has enough stock.

Exporters are also feeling the impact of the bottlenecks. When containers are unloaded at the ports, many are being sent empty back to Asia instead of being held and filled with U.S. goods.

Isaiah Industries sells its metal roofs to Japan, “but we’re having huge delays getting containers scheduled to ship to them. So, we’re sitting here with orders and product to fill those orders but no way to get them shipped,” says Todd Miller, president of the Piqua, Ohio, company.

Miller is also waiting for shipments of raw materials from overseas, including sheeting commonly known as tar paper that is placed under roofing tiles. His problem is he’s competing with every other importer for space on container ships.

“We can get it produced, but it will take four to six weeks before they can load it on a ship,” he says. □



# Researchers study impact of pandemic cancer screening pause

By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE**  
AP Chief Medical Writer

John Abraham's colonoscopy was postponed for several months because of the pandemic. When he finally got it, doctors found a growth too big to be removed safely during the scope exam. He had to wait several weeks for surgery, then several more to learn it had not yet turned cancerous.

"I absolutely wonder if I had gotten screened when I was supposed to have, if this would have been different" and surgery could have been avoided, said Abraham, a mortgage banker in Peoria, Illinois.

Millions of colonoscopies, mammograms, lung scans, Pap tests and other cancer screenings were suspended for several months last spring in the United States and elsewhere as COVID-19 swamped medical care.

Now researchers are studying the impact, looking to see how many cancers were missed and whether tumors found since then are more advanced.

Already, there are hints of trouble. University of Cincinnati researchers found that when CT scans to check for lung cancer resumed in June, 29% of patients had suspicious nodules versus 8% in prior years.

Multiple studies suggest that fewer cancers were diagnosed last year, likely



This February 2021 photo shows Stacy Hill, 48, of Philadelphia.

because of less screening. About 75 cancer organizations recently urged a return to prepandemic screening levels as soon as safely possible.

But tumors take years to develop, and some reports suggest that a few months' delay in screening for certain types of cancer may not have been as bad as feared. For example, researchers in the Netherlands found that a lapse in that country's mammography program did not lead to more cancers being found at a late stage after screening resumed.

The pandemic also bred some creative solutions, such as wider use of tests

that can be done at home. In Philadelphia, a large church partnered with local doctors and used its drive-thru flu shot program to also pass out stool tests for colon cancer screening.

"We're not afraid to try anything as it relates to health and wellness," said the Rev. Leroy Miles of Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church. "The women were encouraging men to get the screening, saying, 'I got my mammogram.' And I'm saying, 'ma'am, you have a colon too.'"

## SCREENING'S MERITS

Screening tests differ in their risks and benefits, and health experts have long debated who should get which ones and how often. The pandemic lapse may serve as a "natural experiment" to see their value in modern times versus what's known from studies done long ago.

Any difference in deaths may not be seen for years, and early detection is only one factor in survival. Treatment also matters and it was hurt by pandemic delays too.

Dr. Ned Sharpless, director of the U.S. National Cancer Institute, estimates there could be nearly 10,000 excess deaths over the next decade because of delayed detection and treatment of breast and colon cancers. Postponing care

"was prudent at one time" because of the risks of COVID-19 exposure, but deferring for too long "may turn one public health crisis into many others," he wrote in the journal Science.

Based on what's known about breast cancer deaths from past years in the United States, about 10% "could have been prevented if women were getting routine screening," but 20% to 25% could have been prevented with appropriate treatment, said Dr. Otis Brawley, a Johns Hopkins University professor and former chief medical officer of the American Cancer Society.

A short-term delay may not hurt mortality much if screening resumes quickly, as it needs to do, he said. Some reassuring news came at a recent American Association for Cancer Research conference from Sabine Siesling of the Netherlands Comprehensive Cancer Organization. That country offers women ages 50 to 74 a mammogram every two years but stopped in mid-March because of COVID-19. After it resumed in late summer, results "did not show any shift" to more advanced tumors, she reported.

Researchers from Massachusetts General and Brigham and Women's Hospital analyzed their screening tests for lung, cervi-

cal, colon, prostate and breast cancer. Screening dropped dramatically from March through June but the portion that found cancer or a precancer was higher than usual, suggesting that those who did get screened were at higher risk. When screening returned to near-normal from June to September, the number of potentially "missed" cancers was lower than expected.

## GETTING CREATIVE

When 43-year-old actor Chadwick Boseman died of colon cancer last summer, Miles feared for the 12,000 members of his Philadelphia church. Black people are more likely to die of the disease than other groups, and there was limited access to colonoscopies, which can find and remove growths before they turn cancerous.

Miles, who has drawn more than 1,000 church members to other health events, called the University of Pennsylvania and said, "we know how to get people to come if you're willing and able to set something up."

Dr. Carmen Guerra had a federal grant to increase screening in racially diverse communities and realized that home tests could help. Studies show these tests, which look for blood in stool, help save lives. People put a tiny stool sample in a tube and mail it to a lab or, in this case, use a drop box at the church. If blood is found, the next step is colonoscopy.

Doctors passed out kits in the parking lot during a drive-thru flu shot event in October. Church members had to watch a video about colon cancer in advance and register to ensure they qualified for screening.

So far, 154 kits have been returned. Stacy Hill was among the 13 who tested positive.

The 48-year-old Philadelphia woman had just lost her job and health insurance. Her colonoscopy revealed two growths that, like Abraham's, were caught before they turned cancerous. □

## Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

	9			5		1	8	
3		2			4		5	6
	7					2		4
			2		8		6	
7								2
	8		6		3			
9		7					2	
5	4		3			6		9
	2	1		8			7	

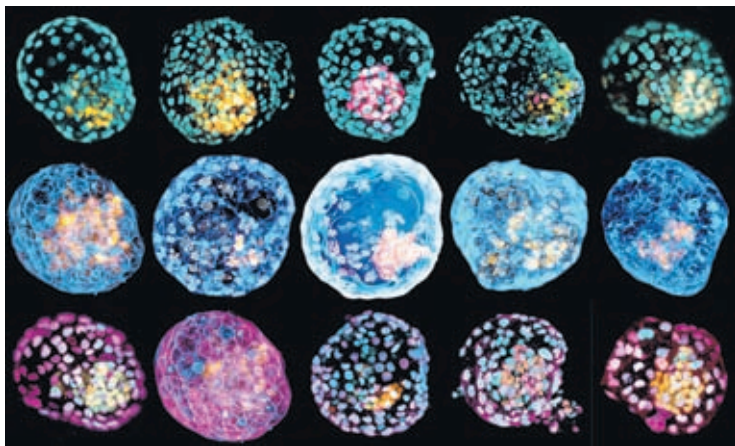
Difficulty Level ★

3/22

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## Pre-embryos made in lab could spur research, ethics debates



This undated combination of microscope images provided by Monash University in March 2021 shows different "iBlastoids" (embryo-like structures) stained to highlight different cell types.

Associated Press

By CHRISTINA LARSON

AP Science Writer

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — For the first time, scientists have used human cells to make structures that mimic the earliest stages of development, which they say will pave the way for more research without running afoul of restrictions on using real embryos.

Two papers published Wednesday in the journal *Nature* detail how two teams of scientists independently made such structures.

They stressed that their work is only for research, not reproduction, but it likely will pose new ethical questions.

"Studying early human development is really difficult. It's basically a black box," said Jun Wu, a stem cell biologist at the University of Texas, Southwestern Medical Center.

"We believe our model can

open up this field," he said, if "you can test your hypothesis without using human embryos."

Wu's team used embryonic stem cells and the second team used reprogrammed skin cells to produce balls of cells that resemble one of the earliest stages of human development.

These balls, called blastocysts, form a few days after an egg has been fertilized but before the cells attach to the uterus to become an embryo. To differentiate their models from blastocysts created through fertilization, the researchers refer to the structures as "iBlastoids" and "human blastoids."

"They shouldn't be considered as equal to a blastocyst, although they are an excellent model for some aspects of biology," said Jose Polo, an epigeneticist at Monash University in Australia who led the second

research team.

Both groups stressed that the structures they made were not the same as naturally occurring embryos, and it's unclear whether they could develop into viable embryos.

"The blastoids are less efficient in terms of generating structures mimicking later stage human embryos," said Wu, whose team stopped growing the structure in a culture after four days.

Scientists previously generated similar structures of mouse cells in a lab, but this is the first time they

have been made from human cells. □

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# Fueled by fans, ‘Zack Snyder’s Justice League’ hits HBO Max

By **LINDSEY BAHR**  
**AP Film Writer**

Zack Snyder never really believed that his cut of “Justice League” would see the light of day. It has technically existed since January 2017, but it wasn’t in any shape to be released. It was four hours, in black and white, had storyboards where visual effects were supposed to go and an unfinished score. “When I finished it, I said, oh well, no one will ever see this movie,” he said. Although he’s officially credited as the director of the DC superhero mashup with Gal Gadot’s Wonder Woman, Ben Affleck’s Batman and Jason Momoa’s Aquaman that hit theaters in the summer of 2017, he and Deborah Snyder — his wife and producing partner — had stepped away from the film months earlier. Relations had strained with the studio, and the pressure was getting to be too much, especially after the suicide of their 20-year-old daughter Autumn. So the Snyders walked away, and Joss Whedon was hired to revamp and finish “Justice League.” The result was both a critical and financial letdown, and, according to cast members like Ray Fisher, who plays Cyborg, a toxic environment too. The Snyders had mostly disconnected from the whole ordeal, but fans wouldn’t



This image released by HBO Max shows, from left, Jason Momoa as Aquaman, Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman, and Ray Fisher as Cyborg, in a scene from “Zack Snyder’s Justice League.” Associated Press

stop asking for The Snyder Cut. And their gestures kept getting more and more elaborate: Planes with #ReleaseTheSnyderCut banners were flown over the Warner Bros. lot in Burbank and during the 2019 San Diego Comic-Con. They even leased a billboard in Time’s Square. Over the years, the hashtag became so ubiquitous, it even turned into a bit of a joke. Why on earth would a studio pay for a redo of an epic disaster? Well, a few things happened: There was a change

of leadership at the studio and suddenly everyone was in search of content for their new streaming service HBO Max. Warner Bros. Pictures Group chair Toby Emmerich asked the Snyders if they could release what they had. “We were like, it’s really rough,” Deborah Snyder said. But they saw an opportunity to finish what they started, and she got to work putting together a pitch. It was somewhat familiar territory for the former advertising executive but also in many ways entirely

unprecedented. “I think the biggest challenge was to convince HBO Max that it was worth the money to do it...at the end of the day, for them, it’s a business deal. And they if they’re going to spend X, they want to make sure they’re getting a return on that business,” she said. “And with a movie that had already come out we needed to also show everyone that this was a different animal. This wasn’t the same thing.” The fans were a crucial component. For HBO Max,

it meant possible subscriptions. And the Snyders got the go-ahead to finish the score, add some 2,650 visual effects and film an additional scene with Jared Leto’s Joker. It even proved beneficial that everything shut down because of COVID: It freed up the visual effects houses that are usually booked up years in advance. The result, “Zack Snyder’s Justice League,” debuts on HBO Max on Thursday. It’s not just a director’s cut. It’s a whole new movie. And, it seems, even critics have gotten on board. As of Wednesday, it was sitting at 78% on Rotten Tomatoes — a vast improvement over the original’s 40%.

“It’s the journey of the team coming together. To be able to explore each member of that team and who they are and what their struggles are in this format? We wouldn’t have been able to do that (for theaters),” Deborah Snyder said. “Now we really get this really immersive journey that we get to go on with the characters. And I think at the end it’s more fulfilling. We care about them more because you see where they’ve come from.” Deborah Snyder said that it “still doesn’t feel super real.” It’s mere weeks since they’ve finished it. And it’s also the closing of a chapter. Although the Snyders were some of the main architects of the modern DC universe going back to 2013’s “Man of Steel” and behind the casting of people like Gadot and Momoa, they are moving on to different things, like Netflix’s “Army of the Dead,” which comes out in May. And the DC world is going on without them. □

## Prince Harry gives advice to grieving children in new book



In this Thursday, Jan. 16, 2020, file photo, Britain’s Prince Harry arrives in the gardens of Buckingham Palace in London. Associated Press

By **DANICA KIRKA**  
**Associated Press**  
**LONDON (AP)** — Britain’s Prince Harry has written the foreword for a new book aimed at the children

of frontline workers who died in the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing the pain he suffered as a boy after the death of his mother, Princess Diana. Harry wrote that losing his mother at age 12 left “a huge hole inside of me,” according to excerpts of the book printed in the Times of London. Diana died in a Paris car accident in August 1997. “Hospital by the Hill,” by Chris Connaughton, is the story of a young person whose mother worked at a hospital and died during the pandemic. It is being given to children who have experienced similar losses. “While I wish I was able to hug you right now, I hope this story is able to provide you comfort in knowing that you’re not alone,” Harry wrote in the

foreword. “When I was a young boy I lost my mum. At the time, I didn’t want to believe it or accept it, and it left a huge hole inside of me. I know how you feel, and I want to assure you that over time that hole will be filled with so much love and support.” Harry has on several occasions reflected on the enduring pain he experienced from his mother’s sudden death. He has made mental health awareness a key part of his charitable work. “We all cope with loss in a different way, but when a parent goes to heaven, I was told their spirit, their love and the memories of them do not,” Harry wrote. “They are always with you, and you can hold on to them forever. I find this to be true.” □

4	9	6	7	5	2	1	8	3
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9	3	7	5	6	1	4	2	8
5	4	8	3	2	7	6	1	9
6	2	1	4	8	9	3	7	5



# Bratt's overtime winner carries Devils past Penguins, 2-1

By DAN SCIFO Associated Press

**PITTSBURGH (AP)** — Jesper Bratt scored on a wrap-around at 2:50 of overtime and the New Jersey Devils beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 2-1 on Sunday.

Bratt took a pass from Pavel Zacha and quickly circled the net, tucking a shot between the post and the skate of Penguins goaltender Tristan Jarry for his first career overtime game-winner. "(Jarry) was kind of covering everything for me to shoot at, and I didn't want to force a bad-angle shot, so I just tried to wrap it," Bratt said. "I saw he kind of got caught with one of his legs that he couldn't push through to the other side and I saw my chance to wrap around quick."

The Devils won for the third time in four games. They won for the second time in three games against Pittsburgh since Sunday's game was the third consecutive meeting between the teams. The Devils had three wins in their previous 13 games before Sunday. Bratt scored his second of the season and continued a four-game point streak, while Sami Vatanen also scored his second of the season for New Jersey. Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 35 shots for the Devils. He played his first game since aggravating an upper-body injury during warmups on Thursday. "Mackenzie came up huge for us and had some big saves," Bratt said. "I think we played harder as a group. We wanted to compete and we wanted to win."

Sidney Crosby scored his 12th of the season for Pittsburgh. The Penguins lost for the third time in four games, following a six-game win streak. Jarry made 33 saves for Pittsburgh.

"We generated some decent changes, but we couldn't capitalize," Crosby said. "It was a close game and in overtime anything can happen. We had our looks and we didn't put them in."

Crosby opened the scoring at 3:37 of the first period. He was near the goal line



**New Jersey Devils' Jesper Bratt (63) brings the puck around the net behind Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender Tristan Jarry (35) to score the game winning goal during overtime of an NHL hockey game, Sunday, March 21, 2021, in Pittsburgh. The Devils won 2-1.**  
Associated Press

when he took a cross-ice pass from Jake Guentzel and snuck a shot between Blackwood's outstretched skate and the post.

"It was disappointing to

have that first goal go in, but I thought our response was really good," Devils coach Lindy Ruff said. "We stuck with it and we got rewarded by the end of

the game." Vatanen tied the game at 4:48 of the second period. The Devils swarmed the Pittsburgh net following a power play and Vatanen converted when his slap shot beat Jarry to the glove side. Vatanen, who is one point from 200 in the NHL, has points in three of his past four games.

## BACK-TO-BACK DEVILS

The Devils played their sixth of 11 back-to-back sets on Sunday. They are winless in the first six games (0-6-0), but improved to 3-2-1 in the second game following Sunday's overtime win.

"It felt like, overall, the whole game, as a team, we had a good game," Bratt said. "It was a good bounce-back for us from (Saturday's) game, and to end it like this with an over-

time win was great."

## DEVILS POST UP

The Devils hit a post three times through the first two periods. Yegor Sharangovich hit the post off the rush in the first 20 seconds of the game. He hit another post 30 seconds after the Devils' first goal. Zacha also put a shot off the crossbar on a short-handed attempt in the second period with the game tied 1-1.

"I was a little frustrated that we hit posts," Ruff said. "We hit crossbars, we hit a post right off the start on the first shift ... even on the shift we scored, it looked like we weren't going to score, but eventually we did. It's still kind of bothering us, putting pucks in the back of the net when we're having good outings." □

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## Jones wins Honda Classic by 5 shots, earns spot in Masters

By **TIM REYNOLDS**  
AP Sports Writer  
PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla.

**(AP)** — When Matt Jones won his first PGA Tour title seven years ago, he needed a 45-foot birdie putt just to get into a playoff and then a 40-yard chip-in to take the victory.

This win was far less dramatic, yet just as meaningful. It got him back to the Masters.

Jones won the Honda Classic by five shots Sunday, a final round of 2-under 68 good enough to finish the week at 12-under 268 at PGA National. The margin matched the largest in tournament history, tying the mark set by Jack Nicklaus in 1977 and matched by Camilo Villegas in 2010. "It's been seven years. It's been a tough seven years," Jones said. "I've had ups and I've had downs, as all golfers have, but it gets me into a lot of big tournaments now."

The 40-year-old Australian earned \$1.26 million and, this time, he'll have more than a day to prepare for



**Matt Jones, of Australia, raises his ball after winning the Honda Classic golf tournament, Sunday, March 21, 2021, in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.**

Associated Press

the trip to Augusta National. His win at the Houston Open in 2014 — and his Masters invite — came just one day before he had to go to Augusta, making it a scramble to get family and friends together to share in the experience.

The Masters starts April 8, so he's got much more time to plan this one.

"It's going to be nice," Jones said. "I can go prep for the Masters this time. Last time it was an absolute blur. I can't remember a

thing about it, so I'm going to do some prep this time before."

Jones started the week with a course-record-tying round of 9-under 61. He was three shots behind Aaron Wise after 36 holes after a second-round 70, and his round of 69 on Saturday was good enough to put him up by three entering Sunday.

Brandon Hagy (66) finished 7 under and alone in second on his 30th birthday, his chance at winning

doomed by a third-round 76. Chase Seiffert (64), Brendan Steele (65), C.T. Pan (70), Denny McCarthy (67) and Russell Henley (68) tied for third at 6 under.

"There's a lot of tough holes out there and there's big stakes for sure, but I've been working on some good stuff and it's nice to see some of that pan out," Hagy said.

The only stretch where Jones' grip on the lead seemed in peril was midway through the round; Wise, who once led by six shots during the third round, had four birdies in a six-hole stretch on the front and got within one of the lead.

Wise's chances ended at the par-4 10th. He hit his second into a bunker, then four-putted from 25 feet for triple-bogey. Jones' lead went to four, and he avoided trouble the rest of the way, while Wise finished with a 73 and tied for 13th at 4 under.

J.B. Holmes was in the final group with Jones, three shots back to start the day, and his chances were gone

very quickly. He ended up with a costly final-round 79 for Holmes; second place, where he started the day, paid Hagy \$763,000 while the tied-for-46th finish paid Holmes \$19,070.

Holmes knocked his shot from a greenside bunker off the green and made bogey on the opening hole, then sent his tee shot way right on the par-4 second and needed about 10 minutes to find the ball — it was nestled among palm fronds — and decide how to proceed. He went on to make double bogey there, and when Jones birdied the par-5 third Holmes' deficit had gone from three to eight shots in about 45 minutes. At that point, only a few had a realistic chance at catching Jones. Before long, the outcome was obvious.

"You can't get a tougher golf course to win on than this one, in these conditions," Jones said. "To be able to do that on this golf course is amazing and something I can build on for the future, hopefully." □



**New Zealand's Alice Robinson reacts after completing an alpine ski, women's World Cup giant slalom, in Lenzerheide, Switzerland, Sunday, March 21, 2021.**

Associated Press

**LENZERHEIDE, Switzerland**  
**(AP)** — An aggressive second run lifted teenager Alice Robinson ahead of

Mikaela Shiffrin to win a giant slalom that ended the women's World Cup ski season on Sunday.

## Robinson edges Shiffrin to win final World Cup giant slalom

Robinson had been fourth-fastest in the opening run, trailing 2018 Olympic champion Shiffrin by 0.77 seconds, yet turned it into a victory by 0.28 at Lenzerheide. Meta Hrovat placed third, trailing Robinson by 0.48.

It was the 19-year-old New Zealander's third win in giant slalom on the World Cup circuit.

"Good job," Shiffrin told Robinson in the finish area. Shiffrin, who turned 26 last week, had also started winning World Cup races as a teenager.

Marta Bassino, who already secured the season-long giant slalom title, trailed by 1.45 in seventh.

One day after being crowned the overall World Cup champion, Petra Vlhova ended her tiring season with an 11th-place finish.

The first-ever Slovakian champion in the 54-year World Cup history started 31 of the 33 races. Her emotionally exhausting Saturday included being congratulated in a telephone call with the president of Slovakia, Zuzana Čaputová.

Vlhova took the overall title from Federica Brignone, who placed fourth Sunday and talked of a difficult season held with strict travel and health protocols and no fans allowed in finish areas.

"I've had enough of this season. It was really long, it was really not good," a smiling Brignone told Swiss broadcaster RTS citing the lack of atmosphere at races.

Still, Brignone finished with a flourish as only Robinson was faster in the second run. □